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Cultural localization in online heritage promotion

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the effects of localizing cultural values on perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site. Using Collectivism-Individualism and Power Distance, two preregistered experiments were conducted with a total of 2039 respondents from Portugal and United Kingdom. In Study 1, against expectations, culturally incongruent webpage content expressing low (vs. high) Power Distance generates a higher willingness to visit among Portuguese participants. In Study 2, localized webpage content expressing Individualism (vs. Collectivism) leads to a higher willingness to visit among UK respondents, with the mediation of perceived image. Neither experiment shows an effect of the stimuli on perceived image. Findings suggest limited benefits of localization for heritage promotion and a high tolerance of participants toward incongruent cultural values.

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Localization; Collectivism; Individualism; Power Distance; heritage tourism

Introduction

The process of localization is used to adapt promotional content to convey values that are culturally congruent with those of the reference audience (Kanso & Nelson, 2002). Research indicates that the web is not a culturally neutral medium (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). In fact, cultural differences appear to have an impact on corporate website design, providing support to the notion that websites, and online communication in general, should be culturally sensitive (Calabrese et al., 2014). Scholars as well as practitioners have long recognized the general relevance of cultural adaptation activities to create effective marketing strategies for international audiences (de Mooij, 2019; Mele & Cantoni, 2018). Research highlights the importance of localization across different contexts, including e-commerce (Huggins et al., 2020), airline and hotel marketing (Lituchy & Barra, 2008). Within the tourism industry, research shows that destination websites reflect the cultural orientation of the country where they were created (Tigre Moura et al., 2014). Interviews with destination marketers, members of the European Travel Commission, reveal that the cultural background and preferences of key audiences affect the choice of destination themes (e.g. heritage) and multimedia content to be promoted online. Interviewees declare that culturally sensitive promotion is important for the attractiveness of destination experience (Mele & Cantoni, 2017). Comparative research shows that the spectrum of localization activities includes tailoring content depth (e.g. the number of words and details provided to describe a cultural attraction), search engine optimization (e.g. adaptation of website keywords), and adaptation of cultural values (e.g. emphasis on collective experiences for the Chinese market) (Mele & Cantoni, 2018).

Surprisingly, while destination marketers highlight the benefits of cultural adaptation activities in tourism promotion, only one experimental study so far (to the best of our knowledge) has investigated localization from a demand side, analyzing the effects of cultural value adaptation in

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combination with website design manipulations (Tigre Moura et al., 2014). Given the constant presence of cultural barriers in international marketing, we argue that is important to expand the empirical knowledge on the localization of cultural values, by analyzing the main effects of congruent cultural values (vs. incongruent) and their interactions on participant's perceptions and intentions – without involving website design (e.g. relevance of visuals within a webpage), as its adaptation to specific countries would be considered anachronistic nowadays.

Addressing this knowledge gap, the current research examines the impacts of localizing the cultural values belonging to the dimensions of Collectivism-Individualism (COL-IND) and Power Distance (PD) on online visitors' perceived image and willingness to visit, taking the case of the UNESCO world heritage site Kinderdijk (the Netherlands). Two preregistered, highly powered experiments are conducted to test how participants from two culturally distant countries, Portugal and United Kingdom (Hofstede et al., 2010), respond to manipulated webpages displaying one combination of the cultural dimensions. More precisely, Study 1 focuses on perceptions and intentions toward the heritage *destination*, whereas the follow-up experiment (Study 2) focuses on the perceived destination *experience*.

This paper contributes to the tourism field in multiple ways. First, scholars have called for more experimental research involving localization and online communication (Mele & Cantoni, 2018; Tigre Moura et al., 2014; Vyncke & Brengman, 2010). We answer this call by focusing on the single and interacting effects of congruent (vs. incongruent) cultural values on respondents' perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site. Second, research in heritage tourism has indicated the need to consider cultural differences when developing contents for international audiences (Jung et al., 2018): would cultural congruency alone improve perceptions and intentions toward a heritage site? Examining the impacts of localizing cultural values, in combination with participants' heritage interest, has managerial significance for the improvement of online promotion of heritage tourism.

Literature review

Measuring and localizing cultural values

Culture is defined by Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 6) as 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group […] from others.' Occupying the core of such collective programming, cultural values represent 'broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others' (p. 9) and, among their roles, they are found to guide consumer behavior in tourism (Hsu & Huang, 2016; Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2014).

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), cultural values can be measured and compared at the national level, along six virtual constructs called 'cultural dimensions.' For the scope of this research, two of them are outlined here: COL-IND and PD. The former has been chosen for experimental manipulation because it is one of the most important dimensions in cross-cultural psychology and comparative studies (Meng, 2010); while PD has been identified as one of the most influential factors in decision making about tourism destinations (Correia et al., 2011). In addition, both cultural dimensions have been frequently used in marketing research (Saleem & Larimo, 2017). Although criticized by scholars for their simplistic reduction of cultural phenomena (Jones, 2007), research shows that countries can be reliably distinguished along a series of cultural values (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011) and these are reflected also in online experiences (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2018). In addition, while acknowledging the limitations of Hofstede's model, it is argued here that its clarity and parsimony (Kirkman et al., 2006) make it suitable for experimental research.

COL-IND describes the extent to which individuals are connected to ingroups. Collectivist societies position the identity of the individual (as 'we') in extended families or groups of friends. Instead, individualist cultures prize a person's independence (as 'I') and self-sufficiency with loose societal bounds (Hofstede et al., 2010). Within the tourism context, COL can be conveyed by

emphasizing family and group activities, along with the purchase of gifts and souvenirs for family members (Woodside et al., 2011), while IND can be conveyed by referring to values of independence, uniqueness and self-fulfillment (Tigre Moura et al., 2014). The difference between individualist and collectivist cultures is also reflected in the style of marketing messages. Individualist cultures privilege directness and persuasion based on facts and figures (hard selling approach). On the other hand, in collectivist cultures advertising primarily aims at building trust between companies and customers employing an indirect communication style (Men & Tsai, 2012), and emphasizing intangible elements like harmony (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017) and oneness with nature (Frederick & Gan, 2015).

Hofstede et al. (2010) show that COL and IND have a positive association with high and low PD respectively. PD describes the extent to which people expect and emphasize power differences. Societies that score high in PD assign greater importance to authorities, including celebrities because of their status (Winterich et al., 2018), and to the prestige of a destination brand (Correia et al., 2011). On the other hand, cultures with low PD prefer equality in social relations, regardless of people's status and wealth (de Mooij, 2017; Loi et al., 2012). Consequently, within the tourism context, high PD can be reflected by images and texts emphasizing authorities endorsing the destinations or attractions (Tigre Moura et al., 2014).

The cultural values conveyed by a website can also be adapted to conform to the cultural preferences of the reference audience. In this regard, website localization refers to a set of activities aimed at adapting a website to the cultural needs and preferences of a specific audience, so that it feels 'local' or natural to the receiver (Singh et al., 2009). Among the several strategies available to achieve this objective (Mele & Cantoni, 2017; Tigre Moura et al., 2016), the localization of cultural values generally consists of matching the values expressed by the contents on the website with those held by online visitors from a specific country. In other words, the values conveyed by the website become congruent with those of the reference audience (Singh & Matsuo, 2004).

Scholars argue that if local websites reflect local cultural values, then it would make sense for an international company to also localize their communication in a way that feels local for that market (Chun et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2004). Research suggests that cultural adaptation enhances the online competitiveness of a company and, through a better online experience and satisfaction (Benmamoun et al., 2019), positively affects consumers' attitudes and intentions (Singh et al., 2017). Although some marketing research questions the benefits of cultural congruence (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017; Tigre Moura et al., 2014), studies indicate its importance for advertising effectiveness (Möller & Eisend, 2010) and purchase likelihood (He & Wang, 2017). In addition, research shows that marketing managers from destination marketing organizations invest effort in localization (Mele & Cantoni, 2017), for instance by assigning content production to experts from the reference markets and offering country-specific versions of the destination website.

Heritage, perceived image and willingness to visit

Among the themes promoted by destination websites, heritage is described by Merriman (1991, p. 8) as 'culture and landscape that are cared for by the community and passed on to the future to serve people's need for a sense of identity and belonging.' Scholars highlight the popularity of cultural tourism (Chen & Chen, 2010), consisting of people experiencing built heritage, contemporary arts or cultural events (Timothy, 2011). Arguably an important factor directly affecting prospective tourists' perceived image and visitation intention, heritage interest refers to visitors' general appeal for cultural attractions. Drawing from Leone et al. (2012), it is argued that heritage interest exerts both a direct and a moderating effect on the willingness to visit a heritage site, because participants interested in heritage tourism may be more susceptible to stimuli involving a heritage experience. The effectiveness of promoting a heritage site, in terms of perceived image and behavioral intentions, is then enhanced by visitors' interest in heritage tourism.

A perceived image consists of a conscious, multisensory, mental experience held by prospective visitors (Lai & Li, 2015) and it can influence the success of a heritage site (Remoaldo et al., 2014). Within the tourism domain, a perceived image can refer to a multiplicity of elements, including attractions (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997) and destination experiences (Hunter, 2016). This research focuses on the concepts of destination image (Study 1) and experience image (Study 2), both of which are perceived images and refer to 'the aggregate sum of beliefs, ideas, impressions and expectations' (Chon, 1990, p. 4) held by tourists. Within the context of this research, the difference between the two resides in the object of reference: destination image measures the perception of the *destination* as a unique amalgam of attributes, products and services; whereas experience image measures people's perception of the *activities* and experience offered by the destination. Consequently, the latter is strictly related to the concept of 'telepresence,' described as the experience of a location through a communication medium (Steuer, 1992) – that is, the website or any other online channel used by prospective tourists to virtually experience destination activities and form a perception about them.

Cultural factors have been identified as an important antecedent for perceived (destination) image formation (Kastenholz, 2010; Tigre Moura et al., 2014; Yacout & Hefny, 2014). Scholars argue that visiting a place is not an essential requirement for tourists to form a perceived image (Beerli & Martín, 2004). For potential visitors, the formation of a perceived image is based on a variety of sources (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), including destination marketing organizations' online presence on websites (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015). Research shows that a positive perceived (destination) image influences behavioral intentions (Molinillo et al., 2018) like willingness to visit (Kim & Kerstetter, 2014).

The construct of perceived image can be analyzed both in terms of an overall assessment (single factor) as well as within its separate factors (Tasci & Gartner, 2007), namely the cognitive, affective and overall image components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Cognitive evaluations refer to the knowledge about a destination, product or service, including the quality of the experience (Baloglu, 2001), while affective components refer to the feelings about it. Overall image combines both cognitive and affective evaluations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The multiple- and single-construct approaches for the analysis of perceived image are used in Study 1 and Study 2 respectively, with destination image (Study 1) and experience image (Study 2).

Study 1

The research questions, hypotheses, design, sample size and analysis plan of Study 1 were pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/si3ut.pdf) before data collection in March 2019.

Hypotheses and research question

The literature review highlights a gap in the knowledge about the influence of online content displaying congruent cultural values on visitors from different countries. The present study examines the effect of localized communication on participants' perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site, with the direct and moderating effects of heritage interest. For what concerns the analysis of localization effects, this research adopts the cultural dimensions COL-IND and PD for their relevance in marketing research. Considering what was outlined in the literature review, it is argued that content displaying congruent COL-IND and PD values will positively affect participants' perceived destination image and willingness to visit. Consequently, it is hypothesized as follows:

- H1. Webpages displaying congruent COL-IND values positively affect visitors' cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit, when compared to webpages displaying incongruent COL-IND values.
- H2. Webpages displaying congruent PD values positively affect visitors' cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit, when compared to webpages displaying incongruent PD values.

Based on hypothesis 1 and 2, it follows that webpages displaying exclusively congruent cultural values, both in terms of COL-IND and PD, result in a more positive perceived destination image and higher willingness to visit among participants. One might argue that they strengthen each other, with a multiplicative effect of congruence across multiple cultural dimensions. Yet, one may also argue that there is an optimal level of localization beyond which the effects disappear or may even backfire, as argued by Tigre Moura et al. (2014). In other words, while the congruence for only one dimension may have a positive effect on the dependent variables (H1 and H2), participants may perceive fully congruent communication as tedious, because the novelty of the heritage destination is replaced by cultural familiarity. Instead, they may privilege contents that show a balance between congruent (familiar) and incongruent (novel) cultural values. Therefore, an exploratory research question is needed:

- RQ1. How do webpages displaying congruent values on both IND-COL and PD affect visitors' perceived destination image and willingness to visit, when compared to webpages displaying incongruent cultural values?

Furthermore, based on what was outlined in the literature review, it is argued that participants' heritage interest has a direct and moderating effect on their perceived destination image and willingness to visit a heritage site:

- H3. Heritage interest is positively associated with cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit.
- H4. Heritage interest has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between the exposure to congruent cultural values and cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit.

Methodology

Participants and destination

Portugal and UK were selected for comparison because they occupied reversed positions on the dimensions developed by Hofstede et al. (2010). The two countries had already been chosen for cross-cultural comparisons in previous research, showing relevant differences in terms of information and communication technology use (Amaro & Duarte, 2017; Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). As destination, this study took the case of the Dutch heritage site Kinderdijk: a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1997 (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2018), a prototypical example of (built) heritage destination.

Following Hofstede et al. (2010) cultural scores, the Portuguese national culture is relatively collectivist (cultural score = 27/100), while UK is among the most individualist countries (cultural score = 89/100). The two countries also differ in terms of PD, with Portugal scoring higher on this dimension (cultural score = 63/100) than UK (cultural score = 35/100).

The free software G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul et al., 2007) was used to compute the required sample size for an experiment with 90% power, expecting a small effect $f^2(V) = 0.02$ ($\eta_p^2 = 0.02$) (Tigre Moura et al., 2014), using a MANCOVA. The tool indicated a minimum required of 481 respondents per country.

Participants from both countries were recruited using the commercial crowdworking platform Prolific (2018) and rewarded £ 0.67 (£ 5.03/hour) upon completion. Data were collected in March 2019. A screening questionnaire was used to retain participants that fit with two criteria: their country of birth and nationality matched their residence; they had never been to Kinderdijk. The first criterion increased the probability of selecting participants integrated within those forces like the national education system that contribute to create shared cultural values (Hofstede et al., 2010). The second criterion ensured that respondents would not rely on previous personal experiences at the destination, affecting their perceived destination image and willingness to visit.

The online surveys received a total of 500 complete responses from Portugal and 501 submissions from UK, all aged 18 and older. A tracking item was integrated in the survey page containing the

(only) hyperlink to the webpage promoting Kinderdijk. In addition, the button to go forward was set to appear after one minute, to stimulate participants to click on the hyperlink with the condition before proceeding with the survey. The few participants that did not click on the hyperlink were removed (Portugal = 5; UK = 3), resulting in a total of 993 valid responses: 495 from Portugal and 498 from UK. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 (2019).

The online survey was available in the mother tongue of the participant and the link was accessible through the platform Prolific (2018). To test the hypotheses and answer the research question, this study used a 2 (COL vs. IND) × 2 (high PD vs. low PD) × 2 (Portugal vs. UK) between-subjects design, with one condition per participant.

Measures

Each condition consisted of a single responsive webpage with both image and text displaying a combination of manipulated cultural values, offered in the native language (British English and Portuguese) of the respondent. Overall, the webpages were promoting the same types of activities at the heritage destination Kinderdijk, but with a different style and recommended experience according to the values to be conveyed. The webpage content had no hyperlinks and was subdivided into three main sections with respective headers and photographs: the introduction to the heritage site, with its history and characteristics; the description of the activities; booking information and ticket prices (which did not vary across conditions). All sections showed quotations about the heritage experience at Kinderdijk, emphasizing a different combination of cultural values depending on the condition. Each cultural dimension was represented by the same number of pictures and by a similar number of words. The webpage content was elaborated following the operationalization of the cultural dimensions indicated by the literature review and a study by Mele and Lobinger (2018) on the visual representation of cultural values (Table 1).

To produce the experimental conditions, four webpages were first constructed from a master document in English, each of them with four pictures (with captions) and text displaying specific cultural values. Second, the four webpages were discussed, and their contents improved in a focus group with other researchers. Third, given the importance of visuals in inspiring visitors (Lee & Gretzel, 2012), three pilot tests with a between-subjects design were conducted online until the photographs were correctly categorized in terms of COL-IND and PD by participants. Finally, once participants were able to recognize both dimensions, the four chosen pictures were integrated into a total of eight single webpages, four in British English and four in Portuguese, which were then used as stimuli in both studies. To ensure the quality of all textual contents (including the main survey), backtranslation was performed together with two Portuguese mother tongue individuals, who were also proficient in English.

Items and scales for cognitive, affective, overall destination image and willingness to visit are illustrated in **Table A1** (Appendix 1). Cognitive image was measured with five items: four of them (friendly/unfriendly, lively/stagnant, interesting/boring, overcrowded/uncrowded) adapted from Ekinci and Hosany (2006), one exploratory item 'novel/familiar' was added to evaluate participants' perception of novelty and familiarity connected to Kinderdijk. As the first reliability tests yielded a

Table 1. Operationalization of cultural dimensions for the elaboration of webpage content.

	Images	Text
Collectivism	Groups with subjects looking at the viewer.	Group (family and friends) related activities, with indirect communication style highlighting entertainment, harmony and togetherness.
Individualism	One single person, not looking at the viewer.	Independence, freedom, uniqueness, with direct, hard-selling communication style.
High Power Distance	Authorities recommending the heritage site (embedded text and icon).	Recommendations by authorities.
Low Power Distance	Common visitors recommending the heritage site (embedded text and icon).	Peer-to-peer recommendations.

low Cronbach's $\alpha = .54$, two items (uncrowded/overcrowded, novel/familiar) were removed. The second reliability test with 3 items yielded a Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$, which, being very close to .70, was considered as acceptable (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Subsequently, the three items were averaged for the main analysis ($M = 5.50$, $SD = .96$).

Affective image was measured with four items (pretty/ugly, pleasant/unpleasant, exciting/gloomy, relaxing/distressing) developed by Hosany et al. (2006) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$, $M = 5.90$, $SD = .87$). Overall image was assessed with one single item reporting the overall impression of the site, as proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999) ($M = 6.17$, $SD = .71$).

Willingness to visit Kinderdijk was measured using two items adapted from Dodds et al. (1991) ($r = .60$, $p < 0.01$, $M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.04$). All items were rated on 7-point scales, with the most positive evaluation assigned to the highest score.

Concerning heritage interest, participants were asked with three items about their interest in heritage tourism, whether they usually visited cultural attractions, and whether they valued visiting UNESCO attractions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$, $M = 3.91$, $SD = .69$) (Table A1, Appendix 1). Among the covariates, online trust was assessed on two items adapted from Kim et al. (2011), namely 'official tourism destination websites are reliable' and 'reviews by other tourists are trustworthy,' measured on 5-point scales. As there was a weak correlation between the two items ($r = .29$, $p < 0.01$), it was decided to treat these two items separately for the main analysis. The study also accounted for other exploratory covariates that could affect the results: age, gender, household members, education level, general travel experience and past business / leisure travel experience in the Netherlands.

Manipulation checks

The manipulation checks confirmed that participants correctly recognized the cultural stimuli of the conditions and, consequently, engaged with webpage contents. One-tailed independent sample t-tests showed that webpages in the collectivist conditions were associated more with heritage experiences 'with family or friends' ($M = 6.65$, $SD = .59$) than 'by yourself' ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.17$), while the individualist counterparts were associated more with experiences 'by yourself' ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.36$) than 'with family or friends' ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.72$); these differences were significant for COL ($t(740.012) = -13.341$, $p = .000$) as well as IND ($t(937.224) = 15.912$, $p = .000$). The manipulation check for PD showed that participants correctly associated high PD conditions with heritage experiences recommended 'by authorities' ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.71$) and low PD conditions with recommendations 'by peers' ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.98$). As with the previous dimension, these differences were significant $t(968.687) = 14.687$, $p = .000$.

Following Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2018), a set of questions from the Value Survey Module (Hofstede et al., 2010) was used to measure participants' cultural orientation in terms of COL-IND and PD. Results showed that the Portuguese sample was more collectivistic (cultural score = 38/100) than the UK sample (cultural score = 48/100). Portuguese respondents were also higher on PD (cultural score = 32/100) than their counterpart (cultural score = 20/100). Thus, the relative differences on the cultural scores for both dimensions had the same direction indicated by Hofstede et al. (2010), yet their distance was not as marked as reported by those scholars. Consequently, the congruence between the manipulated conditions and participants' cultural orientation was assumed from the outcome of the manipulation check and respondents' cultural scores. A similar assumption had already been made in previous tourism research on the effects of cultural localization (see Tigre Moura et al., 2014).

Results

Given the presence of multiple interacting dependent variables and the necessity of accounting for covariates as well as a moderator, MANCOVA was used for data analysis. Heritage interest was

Table 2. Study 1 – MANCOVA and univariate follow-ups of Willingness to Visit.

			Univariate Follow-Ups		
	Pillai's Trace	Error df	*df*	*F*	η_p^2
Covariates					
Online Trust: item 1	.011	966	1	6.71*	.007
Online Trust: item 2	.025	966	1	22.61***	.023
Age	.030	966	1	6.75**	.007
Main and interaction effects					
Heritage Interest	.143	966	1	135.66***	.123
Country*PD	.007	966	1	4.67*	.005
Error			969		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Study 1 – Estimated marginal means of Country*PD.

Dependent variable	Country	PD	*M*	*SE*
Willingness to Visit	United Kingdom	Low PD	5.77	.06
		High PD	5.75	.06
	Portugal	Low PD	5.88	.06
		High PD	5.60	.06

centered, inserted as covariate and included in a custom multivariate model in SPSS (IBM, 2019) as interaction term with the other factors.

After controlling for the significant effects of age, online trust item 1 ($V = .011$, $F(4, 966) = 2.602$, $p = .035$) and item 2 ($V = .025$, $F(4, 966) = 6.182$, $p = .000$) (Table 2), Pillai's Trace did not indicate any multivariate effect of the stimuli on the dependent variables also when the moderator was included. A similar result was obtained also after excluding the covariates from the analysis.

Separate ANOVAs on the outcome variables revealed one significant effect of 'Country*PD' on willingness to visit ($F(1, 969) = 4.666$, $p = .031$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$). Unexpectedly, Portuguese participants assigned to the conditions with incongruent (low) PD values reported a higher willingness to visit Kinderdijk ($M = 5.88$, $SE = .06$) than after being exposed to congruent (high) PD stimuli ($M = 5.60$, $SE = .06$) (Table 3). Consequently, hypothesis 1 and 2 were not supported. In addition, providing an answer to the exploratory research question 1, results did not indicate any interaction effect between congruent cultural values and dependent variables.

As expected, Pillai's Trace indicated a significant direct effect of heritage interest on the dependent variables, $V = .143$, $F(4, 966) = 40.226$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .143$. Separate ANOVAs on the outcome variables revealed a significant positive effect on cognitive image $F(1, 969) = 47.469$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .047$; affective image $F(1, 969) = 47.028$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .046$; overall image $F(1, 969) = 101.635$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .095$; and willingness to visit $F(1, 969) = 135.659$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .123$. Consequently, hypothesis 3 was supported. The analysis revealed no moderating effect of heritage interest on the relationship between the stimuli and the dependent variables, rejecting hypothesis 4.

Study 2

Overall, results from Study 1 did not confirm what was hypothesized regarding the effects of localization on destination image and willingness to visit a heritage site. Yet, such unexpected results could be caused by the fact that the items of the main dependent variables were addressing Kinderdijk as a heritage destination, rather than the (perceived) experience at Kinderdijk. If this was the case, participants did not consider the localized activities and experiences, displaying the manipulated cultural values, when rating the items of the questionnaire. Instead, they gave a relatively positive rate to the heritage site *per se*. Therefore, to test this argument and capture the effects of localization on the designated dependent variables, it was decided to re-direct the questions toward

the recommended heritage activities and experiences at Kinderdijk in a follow-up experiment. Consequently, Study 2 focused on the heritage *experience*, something of great relevance for cultural tourism (Chen & Chen, 2010). Participants were asked to evaluate a set of items about their perceptions, feelings and overall impressions of suggested experiences (activities) – that is, experience image – followed by questions asking whether they were willing to visit Kinderdijk in the same way as recommended by the testimonials on the webpage (e.g. traveling in group or by yourself). In Study 2, (perceived) experience image was treated as a single factor for two reasons. First, Study 1 did not indicate any difference among cognitive, affective and overall image in terms of localization effects. Second, as shown by previous research (e.g. Tasci & Gartner, 2007), visitors' perceived image can be analyzed as a single factor to predict future behavioral intentions. Therefore, a mediated-moderation model was used in Study 2, whereby experience image acted as a mediator between the stimuli and willingness to visit, with heritage interest moderating these relationships. Finally, following the findings from Study 1, heritage interest was again analyzed for its direct and moderating effects on experience image and willingness to visit.

The research questions, hypotheses, design, sample size and analysis plan of Study 2 were preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/dj84x.pdf) before data collection in June 2019.

Hypotheses and research question

Study 2 considers experience image as a mediator between website localization and future behavioral intentions. Based on what is outlined in the literature, it is argued that congruent cultural values in terms of COL-IND and PD positively affect the perception of Kinderdijk heritage experience. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows:

- H1. Webpages displaying congruent COL-IND values positively affect visitors' experience image.
- H2. Webpages displaying congruent PD values positively affect visitors' experience image.

In turn, the perceived image of the heritage experience is expected to affect the willingness to visit the heritage site (in the way recommended by the webpage). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H3. A favorable experience image is positively associated with willingness to visit.
- H4. Experience image mediates the relationship between the exposure to congruent cultural values and willingness to visit.

Following the results from Study 1, it is argued that heritage interest will have a direct positive effect on both experience image and willingness to visit. In addition, participants' heritage interest will make them more receptive to culturally adapted messages promoting activities in a heritage destination, influencing the relationships among stimuli, mediator, and outcome variable. Consequently, it is hypothesized as follows:

- H5. Heritage interest is positively associated with experience image and willingness to visit.
- H6. Heritage interest has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between the exposure to congruent cultural values and experience image.
- H7. Heritage interest has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between experience image and willingness to visit.

Finally, drawing from the argument in Study 1 on the interaction of congruent cultural values, the following exploratory research question is proposed:

- RQ1. How do webpages displaying congruent values on both IND-COL and PD affect visitors' experience image, when compared to webpages displaying incongruent cultural values?

Methodology

Participants and destination

As in Study 1, this follow-up experiment was conducted with participants from Portugal and UK and the destination was Kinderdijk, a UNESCO heritage site in the Netherlands. In Study 2, the effects of the stimuli were assessed using a single dependent variable (experience image), therefore the main pre-registered statistical test for Study 2 was an ANCOVA, which brought a change in the calculation of the power analysis. More precisely, G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul et al., 2007) was asked to calculate the minimum required sample size for an experiment with 90% power, expecting a small effect $f = 0.1429$ ($\eta_p^2 = 0.02$), as a result of performing an ANCOVA. The output indicated a sample size of 517 participants, which was rounded to 520 per country. Participants from both countries were recruited using the commercial platform Prolific (2018) and rewarded £ 0.42 (£ 5.04/hour) upon completion of the survey. Data were collected in June 2019. The same screening questions of the previous experiment were applied, and participants from Study 1 were excluded. The online surveys received a total of 523 complete valid submissions from Portugal and UK respectively, 1046 in total, all aged 18 and older.

The design and procedure of the online survey was the same of Study 1, but it was decided not to ask participants about their cultural orientation, as the participant pool was the same (Prolific) and it would have produced an almost identical outcome to the one from the previous experiment.

Measures

The stimuli in Study 2 were identical to those used in Study 1 (Table 1): four webpages for the promotion of the heritage destination Kinderdijk to Portuguese and UK participants respectively, showing a set of manipulated cultural values (COL-IND and PD). The changes affecting the dependent variables and covariates are outlined below.

Items and scales for experience image and willingness to visit are illustrated in **Table A1** (Appendix 1). Experience image was measured on five items adapted from Baloglu (2001) (wonderful/terrible; interesting/boring; pleasant/unpleasant; good value for money; overall image), shifting the original focus of the scale from the destination to the activities (experience); and one exploratory item 'the activities described on the webpage would be the best way for me to experience Kinderdijk' (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$, $M = 5.70$, $SD = .82$). Willingness to visit was measured on two items adapted from Dodds et al. (1991), $r = .76$, $p = 0.01$ ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.24$, for the combined scale). As in Study 1, the items for both experience image and willingness to visit were rated on 7-point scales.

Heritage interest was measured using the same items as in Study 1 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$, $M = 3.93$, $SD = .75$). For what regards the covariates, as there was only a weak correlation between the items measuring online trust in Study 1, in this follow-up experiment we used the same two items proposed by Kim et al. (2011) (**Table A1**, Appendix 1), $r = .69$, $p < 0.01$ ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .67$, for the combined scale). The items for both heritage interest and online trust were rated on 5-point scales. Finally, age and education were kept as covariates as they had a significant effect on the dependent variables in Study 1. All the other exploratory covariates used in Study 1 (Study 1, Measures) were excluded from the preregistration and analysis.

Manipulation checks

Using a single bipolar item, manipulation checks confirmed that participants correctly associated COL conditions with heritage experiences 'with family or friends' ($M = 6.52$, $SD = .88$) and IND conditions with experiences 'by yourself' ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.69$), $t(796.680) = -17.173$, $p = .000$. Similarly, webpages conveying high PD values were connected to experiences recommended 'by authorities' ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.81$), while those with low PD values were connected to recommendations 'by peers' ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.93$), $t(1039.907) = -18.114$, $p = .000$.

Results

Given the presence of multiple interacting categorical variables (which could not be taken separately), the necessity to account for covariates, a mediator and a moderator, ANCOVA and regression analysis were used to examine localization effects within a mediated-moderation model. Study 2 thus followed the causal steps approach by Baron and Kenny (1986) on mediation analysis by first testing the effect of the independent variables on the mediator (experience image), followed by a two-step test – both with and without the mediator – of the effect of the independent variables on willingness to visit (see Lee & Cranage, 2011, for an application in the area of online tourism).

Heritage interest was centered, entered as covariate and included in a custom univariate model in SPSS (IBM, 2019) as interaction term with the other factors. After controlling for the effect of education, $F(1, 1027) = 10.990$, $p = .001$, and online trust, $F(1, 1027) = 51.529$, $p = .000$, ANCOVA revealed no significant effect of congruent or incongruent cultural values on the experience image, also when the moderator was included. Similar results were obtained when excluding the covariates from the analysis. Therefore, hypothesis 1, 2, and 6 were not supported. In addition, with reference to research question 1, results did not indicate any significant effect of the interaction of congruent cultural values on experience image.

In order to test the mediating role of experience image, a two-step regression analysis of willingness to visit was conducted by entering the following variables in this order: (Step 1) fixed factors, heritage interest and their interactions; (Step 2) experience image and its interaction with heritage interest (Table 4). The fixed factors were COL-IND, PD and Country (Portugal vs. UK). Afterwards, experience image was included in an ANCOVA as a covariate to analyze the effects of the independent measures on the outcome variable.

The regression analysis showed a significant positive association between willingness to visit and experience image ($\beta = .72$, $p = .000$), supporting hypothesis 3. Contradicting what was hypothesized, there was no moderating effect of heritage interest on the relation between experience image and willingness to visit. Therefore hypothesis 7 was not supported. In the first step of the regression model without experience image, the test showed a significant positive association between 'Country*COL-IND' and willingness to visit ($\beta = .12$, $p = .037$). In the second step the same effect became non-significant ($\beta = .07$, $p = .082$), indicating an indirect effect of the stimuli on willingness to visit.

One ANCOVA showed that participants from UK reported a higher willingness to visit Kinderdijk after visiting webpages with congruent IND values ($M = 5.51$, $SE = .07$) than with incongruent

Table 4. Study 2 – Regression Analysis of Willingness to Visit.

	Step 1				Step 2			
	b	SE	β	t	b	SE	β	t
Constant	4.259	.264		16.152	5.224	.185		28.229
Country	.084	.130	.034	.647	-.012	.091	-.005	-.134
COL-IND	-.394	.096	-.159***	−4.122	-.129	.067	-.052	−1.935
PD	.078	.095	.032	.821	.046	.066	.019	.700
Age	.017	.032	.016	.532	-.010	.022	-.009	-.448
Education	-.093	.030	-.086**	−3.110	-.023	.021	-.022	−1.123
Online Trust	.354	.053	.192***	6.699	.075	.038	.041*	2.010
Heritage Interest	.633	.058	.382***	10.992	.201	.044	.122***	4.593
Country*COL-IND	.351	.168	.122*	2.092	.202	.116	.070	1.740
Country*PD	-.106	.167	-.037	-.639	-.102	.116	-.035	-.880
Country*COL-IND*PD	-.065	.197	-.017	-.330	-.114	.136	-.030	-.838
Country*COL-IND*Heritage Interest	-.160	.159	-.043	−1.011	-.033	.111	-.009	-.297
Country*PD*Heritage Interest	-.131	.161	-.035	-.814	-.003	.113	-.001	-.025
Country*COL-IND*PD*Heritage Interest	.244	.264	.046	.926	.065	.183	.012	.354
Destination Experience Image					1.085	.033	.718***	32.875
Destination Experience Image*Heritage Interest					-.007	.029	-.005	-.241

Note: (1)Adjusted $R^2 = .231$; (2)Adjusted $R^2 = .632$.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

COL values ($M = 5.12$, $SE = .07$). No difference was found for Portuguese participants. Consequently, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

Finally, two separate ANCOVAs revealed a significant direct positive effect of heritage interest on experience image ($F(1, 1027) = 115.548$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .101$), and willingness to visit with experience image as covariate ($F(1, 1026) = 30.478$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .029$). Therefore, hypothesis 5 was supported.

Conclusions

Overall, the findings of both studies suggest limited benefits (at best) of localizing cultural values in tourism heritage promotion. Study 1 did not support what hypothesized on localization effects. In fact, among the findings, we found a positive effect of incongruent (vs. incongruent) PD values on willingness to visit among Portuguese participants, while no effect was found among British respondents. Study 2 indicated no effect of congruent (vs. incongruent) cultural values in terms of COL-IND and PD on destination experience image. On the other hand, providing partial support to one of the hypotheses, results from Study 2 indicated a positive effect among British respondents of localized IND values on willingness to visit Kinderdijk as recommended by the webpage, via a more positive destination experience image. Yet, no such effect was found among Portuguese respondents.

An explanation for this can lie in participants' tolerance for incongruency, leading to a minimal influence of (congruent vs. incongruent) cultural values on travel preferences and intentions. Indeed, while respondents from both countries differed in their value preference for both COL-IND and PD, this did not affect their behavior in assessing their perceived image and willingness to visit Kinderdijk, even when it was promoted by emphasizing incongruent values.

Respondents' indifference toward cultural variation in advertising content (e.g. COL vs. IND) can be a consequence of larger European dynamics toward inclusive views that have been pushing individuals to accept cultural values that are different from their own (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017). Indeed, prospective tourists navigating the web are exposed to a variety of multimedia contents produced in culturally distant countries, as testified for example by cultural value differences in travel blogs (Lee & Gretzel, 2014) and tourism websites (Tigre Moura et al., 2014). The plurality of cultures expressed by tourism online sources can thus have heightened the tolerance threshold toward incongruent cultural values, leading participants to also appreciate heritage tourism experiences that do not fit implicitly with their own value orientations – at least within a European context.

In line with our hypotheses, heritage interest had a direct positive effect on perceived image and willingness to visit in both Study 1 and Study 2. Yet, heritage interest did not have a positive moderating effect in either experiments. An explanation for this outcome can be that, when evaluating the dependent variables, British and Portuguese participants did not associate the *specific* manipulations to promote Kinderdijk with their *general* interest in heritage tourism, because from an affective and cognitive viewpoint heritage interest was too distant from the stimuli – hence, heritage interest did not enhance their effect on perceived image (in both studies) and willingness to visit. The same interpretation can apply to the lack of moderation on the relationship between perceived experience image and willingness to visit (Study 2), meaning participants' *general* interest in visiting cultural attractions did not make them more receptive toward Kinderdijk experience image.

The present article contributes to the body of cross-cultural tourism literature, by showing that the localization of cultural values has minimal effects on travel perceptions and intentions. These findings complement previous tourism research on localization. With reference to those who argue in favor of cultural novelty (incongruence) over familiarity (congruency) for destination websites (Tigre Moura et al., 2014), this article provides evidence that participants from culturally distant countries do not prefer tourism websites displaying incongruent cultural values over those displaying congruent cultural values (and vice versa). For what regards research suggesting cultural adaptation benefits, this article critically questions the effectiveness of localizing cultural values to improve travelers' perceptions and intentions, at least within a European context.

This paper has two main managerial implications. Following our experimental findings, the present research suggests to heritage tourism marketers – within the European context – to emphasize the cultural values of their country in their online promotion to European markets, without allocating resources to prioritize cultural similarity for a 'local feel' over cultural difference (and vice versa). This decision can lead to several advantages, such as reduced costs related to content production and distribution across channels; common standards (from a cultural value viewpoint) to promote heritage experiences to European markets; and integration of social media reviews regardless of the cultural orientation of the reference audience – as also Portuguese (high PD) respondents prefer peer reviews. On the other hand, as shown by the effect of covariates and heritage interest on perceived image and willingness to visit, this research further confirms that content adaptation should be based on audience's demographics and psychographics rather than cultural (value) orientation.

As with other studies, this article presents limitations, which open the road for future research. To test the hypotheses and research questions, we retrieved participants from Prolific (2018). Despite its qualities and screening advantages compared to other platforms (Palan & Schitter, 2018), it may represent a limitation for the cultural representativeness of the samples from Portugal and UK. Future studies could use professional sample providers, as performed for example by Alcántara-Pilar et al. (2018). If collaborations with destination managers are possible, researchers could also monitor the actual behavior of online visitors browsing a real website, in combination with A/B testing strategies. Obtaining data from actual website visits would solve the limitation of ecological validity that an online experiment inevitably presents. Additionally, it would provide information about the time spent by each participant on the webpages – a metric that was not possible to monitor in this research and, consequently, it represented a limitation.

In terms of heritage interest, in the light of our research outcome, future studies should consider other moderators, like type of media, as done by Molinillo et al. (2018), whereby the manipulation would be presented in different ways and thus probably lead to a change in the relationship between stimuli and dependent variables.

In sum, our findings provide empirical evidence that the presence of cultural discrepancies within a European context does not support the choice of cultural value localization for heritage tourism promotion, showing stronger acceptance and resilience of prospective tourists toward cultural differences. In the light of this striking finding, future research should explore whether the same conclusion applies to participants from more geographically distant markets.

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Data deposition

The data that support the findings of this research are openly available in the Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/r523y/. DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/R523Y

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Appendix 1

Table A1. Measurement scales.

Constructs and items	Type of scale
Cognitive Image (Study 1)	7-point semantic differential scales (CI1-DE3)
CI1. From unfriendly to friendly	7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (DE4-5)
CI2. From stagnant to lively	
CI3. From boring to interesting	7-point scale from extremely uninteresting to extremely attractive (DE6)
CI4. From overcrowded to uncrowded*	
CI5. From familiar to novel*	
Affective Image (Study 1)	
AI1. From ugly to pretty	
AI2. From unpleasant to pleasant	
AI3. From gloomy to exciting	
AI4. From distressing to relaxing	
Destination Experience Image (Study 2)	
DE1. From terrible to wonderful	
DE2. From boring to interesting	
DE3. From unpleasant to pleasant	
DE4. In my opinion, the activities described on the webpage (included in the entrance ticket) are good value for money	
DE5. The activities described on the webpage would be the best way for me to experience Kinderdijk	
DE6. From extremely uninteresting to extremely attractive	
Overall Image (Study 1)	7-point scale from extremely negative to extremely positive
What is your overall impression of Kinderdijk?	
Constructs and items	Type of scale
Willingness to Visit (Study 1)	7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree
WV1. If I were in Amsterdam, I would like to visit Kinderdijk	
WV2. At the price shown, I would like to visit Kinderdijk	
Willingness to Visit (Study 2)	
WV1. If I were in the Netherlands, I would visit Kinderdijk in the same way as described on the webpage	
WV2. At the price shown, I would visit Kinderdijk in the same way as described on the webpage	
*Online Trust*** (Study 1)	
OT1. Official tourism destination websites are reliable	
OT2. Reviews by other tourists are trustworthy	
Online Trust (Study 2)	
OT1. Official tourism websites are trustworthy	
OT2. Official tourism websites are reliable	
Heritage Interest (Study 1 and 2)	5-point scale from not interested at all to extremely interested (HI1)
HI1. How much are you interested in heritage tourism?	
HI2. As a tourist, I usually visit cultural attractions	5-point scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree (HI2-3)
HI3. As a tourist, I value visiting UNESCO attractions	

* Excluded items because of low reliability ($\alpha < 0.7$)
** Items of this scale were treated separately as they had a weak correlation ($r = .29$, $p < 0.01$)